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ABSTRACT

The historical background and development of postgraduate education in the People's Republic of China (PRC) are discussed. Before the founding of PRC, there were only a few higher education institutions that offered postgraduate programs at the master's level. No doctoral programs were offered and no doctorates were awarded in old China. Before liberation, Chinese colleges and universities and research institutes depended upon western countries for their supply of highly qualified faculty and researchers. Postgraduate education in PRC can be divided into four stages: (1) postgraduate education was started and institutionalized, 1949-1961; (2) there was expansion and improvement and 3-year postgraduate programs were formally institutionalized, 1962-1965; (3) postgraduate education was suspended for 12 years because of the Cultural Revolution, 1966-September 1977; and (4) expansion has occurred since October 1977. Developments include: 358 higher education institutions and 337 research institutes are offering postgraduate programs; the total enrollment of postgraduate students reached 57,500 in 1984, 5.3 times the enrollment in 1978; at the end of 1984, 87 doctorates and over 26,000 master's degrees will have been awarded. Enrollments by fields are also indicated, along with issues that need to be addressed to improve educational quality. (SW)

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# POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Huang Shiqi, MOE, PRC May 1985

## I. Historical Background

Before the founding of the People's republic of China, there were only a few institutions of higher learning which offered postgraduate programmes at the master's level. The KMT Government promulgated its first Statutes on Academic Degrees in 1935 and later more detailed regulations concerning the master's degrees were issued. Altogether less than 300 M.A. or M.S. degrees were awarded during preliberation days. No doctoral programmes were offered and no doctorates were awarded in old China. ( M.D. degrees were awarded by the Peking Union Medical College as professional degrees. ) Before liberation Chinese higher educational institutions and research institutes wholly depended upon western countries for their supply of highly qualified faculty members and researchers. Although a certain research potential and capability for postgraduate education had been built up in China before liberation, they were far from adequate in satisfying the needs of the nation for advanced training.

## II. An Overview of the Development of Postgraduate Education in the People's Republic of China

Roughly speaking the development of postgraduate education in P.R.C. can be divided into four stages:

1) The initial stage extended from 1949--1961, when postgraduate education was started and institutionalized. In 1950 a few universities resumed their programmes of postgraduate edution on their own initiative without any overall planning. The initial efforts were interrupted by the onset of a wholesale and nationwide reorganization of the higher educational system of the country, which was pushed ahead resolutely and hastily in 1952. In November 1953 the Ministry of Higher Education issued a directive entitled "Provisional Regulations on Postgraduate Education in Higher Educational Institutions", which stipulated that the purpose of postgraduate education was to prepare teachers for universities and colleges and to train researchers. In 1957 the State Council approved a proposal submitted by the Ministry of Education on the implementation of 4-year postgraduate training programmes, which could be regarded as the initial efforts towards the establishment of doctoral programmes in China without a correlated system of academic degrees. In August 1959 the Ministry of Higher Education drew up a directive on postgraduate training in higher educational institutions and the planning of recruitment of postgraduate students and on the selection and examination of them. In 1961 the Ministry of Education stressed in its instructions on the enrolment of postgraduate students that postgraduate programmes offered should be associated with the priority areas of teaching and research of the institutions concerned. Thus the regulations promulgated from 1959 to 1961 laid the ground for the expansion of postgraduate programmes in the next stage.

2) The second stage extended from1962 to 1965, when quantitative expansion and qualitative improvement of postgraduate programmes went side by side and 3-year postgraduate programme was formally institutionalized. The characteristic features of this stage may be summarized as follows: 2

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1. Great stress was laid on the development of domestic capability of training postgraduate students. It was stipulated that the academic standards of Chinese postgraduate programmes should be on a par with Soviet candidate of science degree or American Ph.D. gegree programmes.

2. The institutionalization of postgraduate programmes was laid on firmer ground. In January 1963 a national conference on postgraduate education was convened by the Ministry of Education and the Provisional Regulations on Postgraduate Education in Higher Educational Institutions and a number of other related regulations were submitted to the participants for deliberations and finally approved by the Ministry.

3. Effective measures were taken to ensure the quality of programmes offered, including the procedure of selection of students, strict standards on supervisors (only professors and associate professors were allowed to supervise postgraduate students), better coordination between the work of individual suervisors and the guidance given by a collective of researchers, well conceived programmes of training (integrating course work, experimental studies or field surveys, dissertation writing and defence, teaching practice, etc.), etc.

3) The third stage extended from 1966 to September 1977, when postgraduate education was suspended for twelve years because of the disruption brought about by the Cultural Revolution. Resumption of postgraduate training was effected in October 1977.

4) The fourth stage extended from October 1977 up to now. Quantitative expansion has been going on at a good pace as evidenced by the following statistics. The first Academic Degree Statute ever instituted in the People's Republic of China was promulgated in February 1980 and took effect on January 1, 1981.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION
IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA FROM 1978 TO 1984
in '000

| | 1978 | 1983 | 1984 | Figures of 1984 in % of 1978 | Figures of 1984 in % of 1983 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grand Total | | | | | |
| Intake of New Entrants | 10.7 | 15.6 | 23.2 | 216.8 | 148.7 |
| Enrolment | 10.9 | 37.2 | 57.5 | 527.5 | 154.6 |
| I. Institutions of Higher Education | | | | | |
| Intake of new Entrants | 8.2 | 13.1 | 19.8 | 241.5 | 151.1 |
| Enrolment | 8.4 | 30.6 | 48.0 | 571.4 | 156.9 |
| II. Research Institutes | | | | | |
| Intake of New Entrants | 2.5 | 2.5 | 3.4 | 136.0 | 136.0 |
| Enrolment | 2.5 | 6.6 | 9.5 | 380.0 | 143.9 |

III. Current Status of Postgraduate Education

Significant progress has been achieved since 1978 in the field of postgraduate education. Following are some of the main facts and figures:

1) 695 educational and research institutions are offering

educational

postgraduate programmes, involving 25,000 supervisors.

In 1978 when postgraduate training was resumed in the country only 370 institutions were involved, including 208 institutions and 162 research institutes. In 1984 their number reached 695, including 358 institutions of higher education and 337 research units under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, various central ministries and provincial bodies. From 1981 onward, with the implementation of the Statute on Academic Degrees, 196 institutions, including 155 educational institutions and 41 research institutes, have been authorized by the State Council to offer doctoral programmes and to award doctorates; 425 institutions, including 320 educational institutions and 105 research institutes, have been authorized to award the master's degrees.

In 1984 25,000 supervisors were involved in training advanced students, of which 21,000 worked in educational institutions and 4,000 worked in research institutes.

2) Postgraduate programmes have been diversified to meet the needs for highly qualified professional manpower. Total enrolment of postgraduates reached 57,500 in 1984, 5.3 times the enrolment in 1978.

The Statute on Academic Degrees provides for two levels of postgraduate education beyond the bachelor's level, namely the master's level and the doctoral level. In order to meet the needs for professional manpower in a number of fields, where the capability of postgraduate training is limited, recourse has to be made to set up postgraduate courses lasting two years in a number of higher education institutions. The trainees of these courses are entitled to certification upon conclusion of the courses, but no degrees will be awarded. They are more like the taught postgraduates in the United Kingdom or the United States. The enrolment in these courses totalled 1,200 in 1984 and is expected to reach 5,000 in 1985.

Educational and research institutions authorized to offer postgraduate programmes are allowed to accept postgraduate students sent by sponsoring units which suffer from shortage of people with advanced training, provided these trainees meet minimum standards set for admission and their enrolment dosen't interfere with the work of postgraduate training laid down by state plans. These arrangements are made by bilateral agreement signed by the sending and recipient units. The number of this category of postgraduate students reached 1,200 in 1984.

3) By the end of 1984 87 doctorates and over 26,000 master's degrees have been awarded.

Since the the Statute on Academic Degrees took effect on January 1, 1981 87 doctorates have been awarded by the end of 1984, 13 in 1982, 16 in 1983, and 58 in 1984. Although this is a very modest beginning, it marks the end of an era when China could not train its own doctorates in her own academic institutions. By the end of 1984, over 26,000 master's degrees have been awarded, 8,665 in 1981, 5,773 in 1982, 3,500 in 1983, and over 8,000 in 1984.

4) There are altogether 5,405 postgraduate programmes furnishing training in more than 600 specialities, including 1,151 doctoral programmes covering 387 specialities and 4,254 master degree programmes covering 618 specialities. Following is a table giving the figures of enrolment for 1981 and 1984 by broad field.

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## ENROLMENT OF POSTGRAGUATE STUDENTS FOR 1984

(including those enrolled in research institutes, figures in paren- being enrolment in higher educational institutions)

| | 1981 | | | | 1984 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | New Entrants | | Enrolment | | New Entrants | | Enrolment | |
| | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % | Number | % |
| Grand Total | 9,363 | 100.0 | 18,848 | 100.0 | 23,200 | 100.0 | 57,500 | 100.0 |
| | | | | | (19,442) | | (47,058) | |
| Philosophy | 162 | 1.7 | 367 | 2.0 | 400 ( (338) | 1.7 | 1,000 (854) | 1.7 |
| Economics | 405 | 4.3 | 779 | 4.1 | 1,200 (1,022) | 5.2 | 2,700 (2,183) | 4.7 |
| Law | 191 | 2.0 | 373 | 2.0 | 1,010 (778) | 4.4 | 2,100 (1,609) | 3.7 |
| Pedagogy | 93 | 1.0 | 272 | 1.4 | 270 (265) | 1.2 | 600 (589) | 1.0 |
| Of which: Physical Culture | 38 | 0.4 | 168 | 0.9 | 70 (66) | 0.3 | 190 (176) | 0.3 |
| Literature | 649 | 6.9 | 1,628 | 8.6 | 1,080 (1,035) | 4.6 | 2,600 (2,511) | 4.6 |
| of which: Arts | 46 | 0.5 | 85 | 0.5 | 100 (100) | 0.4 | 240 (200) | 0.4 |
| History | 268 | 2.9 | 592 | 3.1 | 500 (450) | 2.1 | 1,400 (1,294) | 2.4 |
| Natural Sciences | 2,411 | 25.8 | 4,064 | 21.6 | 4,780 (3,433) | 20.6 | 13,100 (9,058) | 22.8 |
| Engineering | 3,956 | 42.3 | 7,310 | 38.8 | 10,500 (8,968) | 45.2 | 25,000 (20,979) | 43.5 |
| of which: Mechanics | 235 | 2.5 | 406 | 2.2 | 460 (381) | 2.0 | 1,200 (1,030) | 2.1 |
| Agriculture | 637 | 6.8 | 1,021 | 5.4 | 1,220 (1,086) | 5.3 | 3,400 (2,908) | 5.9 |
| of which: Silviculture | 32 | 0.3 | 74 | 0.4 | 190 (178) | 0.8 | 460 (420) | 0.8 |
| Medicine | 591 | 6.3 | 2,442 | 13.0 | 2,240 (2,067) | 9.7 | 5,600 (5,073) | 9.7 |

IV. Problems and Issues in Postgraduate Education

As the statistics of enrolment show clearly, the distribution of postgraduate students among various branches of learning shows a lop-sided inclination towards natural sciences and technology. This drew comment from a western scholar that "academic fields outside those area often receive unreasonably short shrift"*. This abnormal situation needs years of strenuous efforts to get rectified. Much more human and financial resources have to be put into the development of the humanities and social sciences than they get now.

Furthermore, there are a number of other problems and issues that have to be tackled in the years to come in order to improve the quality of postgraduate education in China. I can only enumerate some of the more important ones here without further elaboration:

1) Improving the procedure of selection and admission to ensure the flow of bright young people into postgraduate programmes by giving greater weight to recommendations rather than depending on the results of examinations alone.

2) Significant improvement of research facilities, especially those of universities and colleges.

3) Pooling of resources of various universities, colleges and research institutes located in the same city or the same district to enhance the quality of postgraduate education.

4) Encouraging the intersisciplinary approach in the training of postgraduates so as to overcome the evils of overspecialization.

5) Encouraging the mobility of postgraduate students so as to avoid inbreeding.

6) Better integration of postgraduate education with research efforts of the same institution.

7) Probing the possibility of relaxing somewhat the demands on the qualifications of the master's degrees to make taught master degree programmes fully legitimate. This necessitates a revision of existing regulations.

8) Building up a system of granting studentships, traineeships, fellowships, etc. to improve the material conditions of the students and to secure additional sources of funding from potential employers.

9) Probing the possibility of international cooperation in the field of postgraduate education, especially among those Chinese institutions which have concluded agreements or partnerships with foreign sister institutions.

10) Strenthening the ideological and political education of the students that befits the needs of a socialist society.

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* Quoted from Dr. Mark Sidel's article entitled "Graduate Education in the People's Republic of China: New Steps, New Challenges", published in "Higher Education" Vol. 12, No. 2, April 1983, an Elsevier Journal.